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M. L. West, *The Epic Cycle: A Commentary on the Lost Troy Epics*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. Pp. ix, 334. ISBN 9780199662258. \$150.00.

**Reviewed by Patrick O'Sullivan, University of Canterbury, New Zealand
(patrick.osullivan@canterbury.ac.nz)**

Martin West's study of the lost Trojan epics is another major contribution of this scholar to Classics in a career spanning well over half a century. As the subtitle makes clear, this commentary does not deal with the Theban saga, or the fragments of other epic poems, such as the *Heraclea* of Panyassis or the *Theseis*. Instead, the focus is on those poems, apart from the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, which complete the entire Trojan saga and its aftermath. Such poems include episodes ranging from Zeus' Malthusian decision to cause the war at Troy (and Thebes) to relieve Earth of excessive human population in the *Cypria*—the world's first-known prequel—to the death of Odysseus as recounted in the *Telegony*.

In the preface West announces that he intends to go beyond analyzing specific fragments and testimonia; he also aims to reconstruct the general narratives of the lost epics (cf. also pp. 51–4). To do this he relies, inevitably, but not solely, on the prose summaries we have from Proclus' *Chrestomathy*; but he also takes into account what ancient literature and art depicting the same stories can tell us about the cyclic epics. The commentary, then, is broad in scope, and is all the more engaging as a result. Naturally, there will be moments when readers will disagree with some of West's reconstructions. But, as a whole, this work is a model of clarity, full of scholarly insights and showing command of a vast range of material combined with plausible analysis. As the first of its kind, this commentary greatly enhances our understanding of these important and influential, if sparsely preserved, poems.

In the wide-ranging introduction we find an excellent preparation for the commentary ahead. It explores many issues and themes generally that receive more specific treatment in each of the six chapters which follow—one for each of the six Trojan cyclic epics (*Cypria*, *Aethiopis*, *Little Iliad*, *Iliou Persis*, *Nostoi*, *Telegony*). West suggests that our major sources for the *Cycle*, Proclus' *Chrestomathy* and Apollodorus' *Bibliothēke*, derive their accounts from digests of the cyclic epics datable to the Hellenistic period. But West interestingly attempts to trace the formation of these epics as a 'Cycle' beyond the Hellenistic period to the shadowy mid-fourth-century figure Phayllos, mentioned by Aristotle (*Rhet.* 1417a15) as putting together a succinct summary of 'the Cycle', which the philosopher compares to Odysseus' summary (ἀπόλογος) of his adventures to Penelope on his return (cf. *Od.* 23.310–41). By 'cyclic' poetry West means poems designed to form

a segment of a vaster narrative sequence, filling in areas not covered by existing epic poems, such as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, both of which can be considered free-standing and complete in themselves (p. 17, cf. p. 20).

West also points out that the cyclic poems are not all cast in the same mould: the *Aethiopis* appears to have been more unified than, say, the *Cypria*, in its continuation of the *Iliad* and in completing the story of Achilles. Nor were all the cyclic epics created ex nihilo after the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* had achieved pre-eminence; rather, what eventually became the *Epic Cycle* is based on oral poems, existing in somewhat fluid form, dating to the eighth and seventh centuries BC (pp. 21-6).

The introduction also deals generally with such issues as ascriptions and authorship and the methodological difficulties of attempting reconstructions of lost material through later literature or artworks (pp. 40-47). Many would baulk altogether at using iconographic material to reconstruct lost literature, but West is right in my view to consider what light such material can shed on at least some lost epics. While remaining cautious, he plausibly entertains the possibility of allusions to certain lost epics in scenes or figures that ordinarily would have no 'organic' connection to each other, but appear together on an artifact, when they are notable features of a lost epic. One example is a painting of the Judgment of Paris by the Kadmos Painter of c. 420 (= LIMC Eris 7) which on an upper level includes Eris and Themis in conversation, figures who feature in the *Cypria* (Arg. 1a, cf. Arg. 1b), but otherwise are not connected to each other.

Treatment of each poem is initially divided into sections dealing with issues of its attestation in ancient literature and art, authorship, date, the scope of its contents and its relation to the great Homeric epics. Then follow the fragments and commentaries. The texts are not translated; West recommends using the translations that appeared in his Loeb edition of the Greek epic fragments in 2003. A few notable differences emerge between this commentary and the Loeb edition: for instance, *Cypria* Fr. 29a and F 14 of the *Nostoi* do not appear in the Loeb edition. Elsewhere, West has revised his thinking on a few points since 2003, and shows an admirable willingness to reassess his earlier published work on the Cycle (see pp. 238-9 where he critiques one of his emendations to Arg. 3b of the *Iliou Persis*).

Considerations of space prevent a detailed account of West's commentaries, but a few points are worth mentioning all the same. West shares Aristotle's view (*Poet.* 1458a37) that both the *Cypria* and *Little Iliad* are episodic (πολυμερῆ); and this is perhaps to be expected at least of the former poem, which is designed to bring the hearer/reader up to speed on the first nine years of the Trojan war. West discusses textual problems in the *Cypria*, suggesting occasional emendations, and notes ways in which the poet not only reflects the language of Homer and Hesiod but also displays novelty in adapting the older poets' formulae (e.g. F 10.6, cf. Hesiod, *Th.* 413; *Il.* 14.204; etc.). Interesting speculations abound here, and West toys with historicizing readings on occasion (p. 93, 116), as well as noting the poem's influence on Pindar, among others (p. 106, etc.).

West dates the *Aethiopis* to the late seventh century, considering it to predate the *Odyssey* and restates his view that it is one of the more unified of the cyclic epics, with the events leading up to the death of Achilles as its central theme; this, he suggests, has its roots in two earlier compositions dealing separately with Memnon and Penthesileia which become combined into what we know as the *Aethiopis* today. He sees Memnon as a post-Iliadic figure, (pp. 145-6) and rightly points out

that claims that the *Iliad* borrows many of its motifs from the *Aethiopis*—so much a hallmark of Neoanalytical scholarship—can be just as plausibly reversed.

Aristotle's view of the disjointed nature of the *Little Iliad* is reiterated by West (p. 169), and he posits a 'programme' of events over a twelve-day period to cover all the major episodes at Troy from the contest over the armour of Achilles to the Sack. Despite its evidently episodic structure, West nevertheless attractively suggests a unifying trajectory throughout the poem that begins with the despair of the Greeks over the death of Achilles and suicide of Ajax and ends with the Greeks triumphant at the sack of Troy. Like other scholars, West also sees the *Little Iliad* as somewhat unusual within the Epic Cycle in its inclusion of earthy, light-hearted elements, such as the Greeks' deciding to let an overheard discussion between two Trojan girls decide who should win Achilles' arms. From this he infers a later playful reworking of the older epic tradition. Such elements are undeniably present in the poem, but as early as the *Iliad* Homer could display earthy humour, such as in book 14 in Hera's comical seduction of Zeus, or the obnoxious Ajax, son of Oïleus slipping over in the footrace during Patroklos' funeral games and ending up with a mouthful of cow-dung. It is surprising then, that West wishes to delete χέσσαιτο γάρ, εἰ μαχέσσαιτο from *Little Iliad* F 2, in which one of the two girls discussing who should get Achilles' armour mentions that a woman 'would shit herself if she fought' in battle. The fact that Aristophanes in his *Knights* (1057) quotes this part of the fragment might also weaken the case for deletion or emendation here.

In contrast, the possibly older *Iliou Persis* shows no sign of light-heartedness, at least in its scanty remains, and West suggests that it never achieved wide currency, thus prompting the poet of *Little Iliad* to compose a new account of the Sack.

The *Nostoi* would seem to be another episodic cyclic epic, integrating several narratives of various heroes' returns from Troy, including Agamemnon, Menelaos and Neoptolemos; the poet, it is suggested, would abruptly change from one narrative to the next to create the original cliff-hangers. West sees in this poem a close engagement with the *Odyssey* and dates both to the late seventh century; he also sees, if not the same poet for both, then extensive contacts between the composers to explain the narrative and structural parallels (p. 250). Among these West argues for a Nekyia scene to parallel that in *Odyssey* 11; on this reading, the *Nostoi* has Menelaos encountering the ghost of his murdered brother, who tells him the wretched tale of his homecoming. While generic connections between the two poems undoubtedly exist, they could be explained by a poet working under the influence of the *Odyssey*, which arguably had attained its pre-eminence decades, if not generations, earlier; it does not seem necessary to me to see the poems as coeval or by the same hand.

Discussion of the *Telegony* by Eugammon concludes with a fascinating conjecture that Odysseus' original death was not at the hands of his son Telegonos, who stabbed him with a spear that had the barb of a sting-ray as its point (Proclus Arg. 4; cf. F 5). Since antiquity, with the notable exception of Aristarchus, this was considered to be what the Homeric Teiresias was referring to when he prophesied that Odysseus' 'mild death' (θάνατος ... ἀβληχρός) would come from the sea (*Odyssey* 11.134-7). West, however, noting that pain caused by a sting-ray barb is anything but mild, argues that Teiresias is referring to an event described in the *Psychagogoi* (F 275) by Aeschylus in which a heron defecates on the bald head of an ageing Odysseus; the hero's death is caused by a fish barb contained in the bird's droppings which poisons his scalp. Such a demise, according to West, also conforms to a number of folktale traditions in Greece and elsewhere in which the

form of death is posited as a riddle. The death at the hands of Telegonos is, following this reading, a post-Homeric invention by Eugammon to add grandeur to Odysseus' demise, and elevate him from his original folk-tale status as a trickster to one of the great heroes of the Trojan saga.

Any reconstruction of material as fragmentary as the (Trojan) *Epic Cycle* will contain much that is speculative, and West admits that at least one of his attempts may stretch credulity (p. 281-2); elsewhere he appears overly reliant on select sources, such as Pausanias, in his bid to reconstruct the final events of *Little Iliad* (pp. 212-22). Yet there is much that is plausible and insightful in this rich and valuable work, since so much of the discussion is informed by a formidable erudition which sits lightly on its author. The writing is clear and engaging, the quality of proofreading high; typos are rare and innocuous (e.g. on p. 142 n. 15; on p. 202 read Plato *Republic* 493d, not 439d). Students and scholars will derive great benefit from West's labours, for his convenient collection and analysis of the ancient source material for the Cycle (e.g., attestations in literature and art), as much as for his wide-ranging and coherent treatment of the Cycle overall. English readers could hardly ask for a better synoptic analysis of the endlessly fascinating remains of this corpus of poetry, which will form the basis for future discussions of the Cycle for decades to come.

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